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REPORT NO. 01-019

ATTENTION: Natural Resources & Culture Committee  
Agenda of January 31, 2001

SUBJECT: State of the San Diego Public Library

### SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE CITY COUNCIL.

### BACKGROUND

The Library Department has been requested to provide information on its current status and future plans at a series of briefings before the Natural Resources & Culture Committee. Following is a summary of the current State of the Library, which is the first of four reports to be presented at these briefings.

### DISCUSSION

Libraries provide vital public services created to ensure the long-term accessibility of recorded information and knowledge. They acquire, catalog, process, organize, offer for use and preserve publicly available material irrespective of the form in which it is packaged. When this information is needed, it can be accessed and used.

Libraries have a unique role in bridging the widening gap between the information haves and have-nots. They play a major role in educating children, assisting adults with life-long learning, bolstering economic prosperity, coping with information overload, closing the digital divide, supporting cultural activities and institutions, promoting literacy, and helping people upgrade their skills to remain competitive. Libraries have a role of preserving cultural heritage and passing it on to future generations. Public libraries also act as a central social forum for their communities. In short, libraries enhance the quality of life for all who live and work in the City of San Diego, whether they personally use the Library or not.

### Mission and Role of the San Diego Public Library

The San Diego Public Library provides services to the residents of San Diego through the provision of a Central Library and thirty-three branch libraries. The Mission of the Library is to:

**Respond to the information needs of San Diego's diverse communities.**  
**Ensure equal access to local, national and global resources.**  
**and address the educational, cultural, business and recreational**

**Anticipate**  
**interests of the**

public.  
welcoming environments.

**Develop and provide**

The Library receives input from the Board of Library Commissioners which represents the community and advises the Library Director and the City Council via the City Manager on library issues. The Library also receives input from the Friends of the Library, which serves as a sounding board and communications resource, and also provides funding for library programs and services.

One of the strengths of the San Diego Public Library system is its participation in three cooperative efforts to extend services and share resources with other libraries at the local, state and national level:

The Serra Cooperative Library System is a network of public libraries within San Diego and Imperial Counties which was established in 1966. Cooperative projects include reciprocal borrowing privileges, training programs, physical delivery of library materials among the member libraries, and the Summer Reading Program. The Serra System Research Center is located at the Central Library and uses its extensive and unique resources to answer reference questions from member libraries.

The Library of California was recently established to provide a statewide networking system of resource sharing, communications and preservation of materials for approximately 8,000 public, academic, school and special libraries. As the Library of California develops, it will eventually replace Serra and the other cooperative systems throughout the state.

Finally, the San Diego Public Library works cooperatively with the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), a nonprofit membership library computer service and research organization with members throughout the nation and world. OCLC provides access to and bibliographic control of electronic information, telecommunications linking, strategic planning in libraries, new technology issues and research.

Library staff also enters into a number of partnerships in order to benefit its customers by providing additional resources and services. The Library has developed partnerships with San Diego schools, museums, The City Club, San Diego Council on Literacy, the Small Business Administration, various corporations, Sister Cities and many others. One partnership, with the Society of Baseball Research, promises to result in the San Diego Public Library having the premier collection of baseball material west of the Mississippi.

A modern public library has evolved to serve a variety of roles: Popular Materials Library, where collections of current materials are maintained; Formal Education Support Center to assist students at all grade levels; Children's Learning Center, where children's natural curiosity and innate desire to learn are nurtured; Reference Library for on-site and telephone assistance to help people find the information they need; Research Library, where scholars and researchers conduct in-depth studies; Independent Learning Center to assist individuals who seek information for self improvement, job related development, or hobbies; and Community Center, where people gather

to experience cultural activities ranging from exhibitions and lectures to musical performances.

The programs and collections of the San Diego Public Library, and public libraries in general, have changed over the years in order to serve the needs of San Diego's changing population. Just since 1980, San Diego's population has grown by more than 45 percent, with the largest growth being in the Hispanic community. More than 54 languages are currently spoken in San Diego households. Recruiting staff members that reflect the diversity of the public and providing programs and collections to serve the needs of this diverse population are greater challenges than for library systems that serve less diverse communities.

### Revenue Sources

In order to provide this service, the Library receives funding from a number of sources. Capital improvements funding is provided by a number of sources, including developer fees, redevelopment funds, grants and donations. The operating budget comes primarily from the City's General Fund (\$27.7 million in FY 2001), but the department also receives operating grants from the State Library (nearly \$2 million estimated for FY 2001). The San Diego County Library is providing some funding to support the combined City/County adult literacy program, and Environmental Services is providing funding to support the operation of the Environmental Services Library. Donations from patrons, the Friends of the Library and corporate sources are also a vital source of funding (over \$800,000 estimated for FY 2001 to support operating expenditures), particularly for library materials and equipment which are matched by the City through the Library's matching funds.

### Operating Expenditures

In terms of expenditures for library services, San Diego ranks below the median in operating expenditures per capita for all public libraries nationally, as well as for urban libraries serving populations over 1 million (per the Public Library Data Service Statistical Report 2000). The Library is also below the median for per capita library materials expenditures, but slightly above the median for salaries, which is a reflection of the cost of living in San Diego.

### Library Services Provided in FY 2000

The San Diego Public Library provides service to the public by providing more than 86,000 service hours annually at its thirty-four library facilities. In FY 2000:

patrons public visited a library facility more than 6.5 million times, approximately 244,000 patrons borrowed nearly 6.4 million items, more than two million reference questions were answered by staff, more than 1.6 million materials were used inside the library but not checked out, attendance at library programs grew to more than 168,000, and there were more than 382,000 sign-ups to use Internet computers.

Meeting rooms in libraries are often in use during all open hours, and in some locations in the evenings after closing. The concern that the growing availability of personal computers in

homes would render libraries obsolete has not materialized (see Attachment 1). The demand for public library service has, in fact, become greater than ever.

### Elements Necessary to Provide Quality Library Service

Quality library service can be broken down into four main elements:

1. staff,
2. collections,
3. library facilities, and
4. technology

The following is an overview of these four elements as they relate to the State of the Library.

#### **1. Staff**

The Library has a total of 401 full time equivalent (FTE) positions to provide public service at 34 library facilities and to provide the support services needed to order and catalog library materials, maintain facilities and equipment, and oversee the administrative and business operations of the department. In addition to paid staff, volunteers provide the Library with a valuable resource, contributing more than 114,000 hours in FY 2000 at an estimated value of \$1.6 million.

In a comparison done in FY 1999 between San Diego and ten large urban library systems, San Diego ranked second in number of library facilities, fourth in population served, but seventh in number of FTE staff. San Diego ranked ninth in the number of staff per population served (see Attachment 2).

The Zero-Based Management Review of the San Diego Public Library presented to the Select Committee in 1998 concluded that both the Central Library and branch libraries had insufficient staffing to provide optimum service to the public. It noted that during the period of 1977 to 1997, while the population of San Diego grew by 37 percent, the staffing of the Central Library decreased by 20 percent. It also stated that "Library staffs, already stretched thin due to short staffing, are being now stretched even further by increasing demands/questions from patrons related to computer, software and Internet use."

#### **2. Collections**

The collections of the San Diego Public Library are the major intellectual resource south of Los Angeles for the general public. The Library has more than 3 million books and audio-visual materials available for patrons to use or check out at its 34 locations.

#### Central Library Collections

Central Library staff has developed a collection of tremendous depth and breadth which includes over 778,000 books and audio-visual items for adults, young adults and children. It also has 1.7 million government documents, 90,000 volumes of bound periodicals, 600,000 microforms and 500,000 pictures. These holdings date in age from 3000 B.C. Babylonian clay tablets to the

latest 2001 issue of *Time*.

The Central Library has more than half a million unique titles which would be too expensive to duplicate at City branches or even at other library systems within San Diego County. The Central Library's professionals select not only its own collection, but also shape the resources of the branch libraries. Approximately 600,000 items circulate each year, and over 465,000 items are used in the Central Library.

Library patrons make more than 700,000 visits each year to take advantage of specialists in five subject sections, the Children's Room and the following distinctive services:

Newspaper Room makes available to the public eighty U.S. and international newspapers, including all local newspapers;

California Room contains reference materials about San Diego, Southern California and Baja California. Materials include *The San Diego Union-Tribune* index, local phone directories, street maps, and archival information pertaining to local history;

Genealogy Room contains a large collection of genealogical books and materials;

Wangenheim Room illustrates the history and development of paper making, book binding, illustration, and printing through works created over 4,000 years, and serves as the Library's rare book room;

Government Documents includes local, state and federal government publications;

I CAN CENTER provides materials such as large print books and books on tape to serve persons with disabilities; and

Computer Lab allows access to the Internet and electronic resources.

For eighteen years, the Central Library received federal grant funds to support its role as a major resource library for the region. This funding ceased in FY 1998, creating a major impact on the Central Library's ability to maintain its collection of in-depth resources.

### Branch Library Collections

The individual branch libraries have collections ranging in size from 40,000 to 115,000 items. Materials are acquired and circulated to meet the immediate needs of a particular library and should be replaced over a five to ten year cycle. The branch books and media collections are supplemented by the more in-depth collection of the Central Library.

The Library participated in the FY 1999 Electronic Collection Assessment Project, which provided a detailed analysis of a portion of the collections of the Central Library and each branch library. The majority of materials in a branch library should be no more than ten years old, and the entire collection should have no more than 20 percent of its collection older than 20 years. The analysis concluded that, in general, the collections in the physical and biological sciences, technology, art and literature are too old. A plan will be established to replace older materials systemwide.

### **3. Library Facilities**

## Central Library

The existing Central Library opened in 1954 when San Diego's population was less than 450,000. The City's population is now more than 1.2 million and is expected to increase to 1.7 million by 2020. San Diego County, which the Central Library serves as a regional resource, is projected to add another million residents by that time.

The size of the Central Library facility is 144,600 square feet, only 46,000 of which are directly accessible to the public. The collections are housed on five floors, but more than half of the collection is housed on the two basement levels which are closed to the public and available only upon request. The Library was designed to house 750,000 volumes at a time when there were no audio-visual materials, and computers, electronic databases and Internet access were in the distant future.

In addition to size constraints, the current building lacks shelving capacity. There is no room to add new materials without removing existing materials that are vital to the public. Seating capacity, originally 423, has decreased to 300 to make room for more book shelves and computer workstations. Since the Central Library maintains a large collection of reference materials for in-library use only, reader seating is inadequate, especially on weekends when the library is most used.

The facility has minimal space for exhibits and displays that complement and promote collections, and the auditorium space is inadequate for cultural events. There is no parking designated for use by library patrons or staff. Due to the overcrowded conditions, staff is exploring moving some of the Central Library functions and materials in storage into another location until a new Main Library is built. Ongoing maintenance of the existing building needs to be addressed as well.

Square feet per capita is a common measure used to compare library facilities. San Diego's current Central Library provides 0.11 square foot per capita. In comparison, the average of 30 central libraries serving the largest urban areas is 0.42 square foot (see Attachment 3).

## Branch Libraries

The period from 1980 to 2000 saw substantial growth and change for branch libraries. In 1980 the library system had 29 branch libraries with an average size of less than 5,000 square feet, and several bookmobiles. During that twenty year period, nineteen branch library projects were completed at a cost of over \$63 million, and the number of branches grew from 29 to 33 as service was expanded to newly developing communities in the north (Carmel Mountain, Carmel Valley, Rancho Penasquitos and Scripps Miramar Ranch). In addition to the four new branches, nine facilities were built on new sites to replace previous facilities. These thirteen new branch libraries have averaged more than 15,000 square feet in size, allowing the library system to offer a wider variety of materials, programs and services than in the past. Overall, branch library square footage has increased by over 128 percent, from 135,878 square feet in 1980 to 309,848 square feet in 2000 (Attachment 4).

Maintenance of the branch libraries has been a long standing issue, with deferred maintenance needs estimated to cost more than \$3 million. State Library Foundation Fund monies were designated in FY 2000 - 2001 to fund improvements in four branch libraries: Balboa, Beckwourth, North Park and Tierrasanta. However, ten older branch libraries are in need of re-roofing and six branches need to have the HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems replaced. At least fifteen branches need new carpeting, and electrical wiring and cabling improvements are needed in most older branches in order to add computers and other equipment. Poorly surfaced parking lots and landscaping issues have also been identified at many locations. Additionally, many circulation counters are not designed ergonomically to assist in preventing repetitive motion injuries.

Branch Libraries most in need of refurbishment include:

Otay Mesa Branch Library, where roof reconstruction and carpet replacement are estimated to cost approximately \$300,000;

Benjamin Branch Library, where roof, HVAC and carpet replacement, interior painting and parking lot resurfacing are estimated to cost \$170,000;

University Community Branch Library, where roof, carpet and circulation desk replacement are estimated at \$80,000; and

Logan Heights Branch Library, where roof, carpet and circulation counter replacement, window repairs, painting and landscaping are estimated to cost \$118,000.

The 1998 Branch Library Facilities Report contains the following physical guidelines for branch libraries:

1. A minimum branch size of 13,000 square feet;
2. A minimum site of 1.5 to 3 acres, depending upon land availability and cost;
3. A maximum service area radius of two miles; and
4. A population served of 18,000 to 20,000 residents, with anticipated growth to at least 27,000 to 30,000 residents after twenty years.

#### **4. Technology**

The San Diego Public Library was one of the first major library systems in the country to convert its holdings to digital form. It now has an automation system that fully integrates the ordering and cataloging of all library books, periodicals and media. The system offers a web based catalog display of information about the Library's books and non-print items at the Central Library and each of the 33 branch libraries. Access is also provided through the World Wide Web.

The Library has 768 computer workstations of which 463 are for public use. The number of computers has grown by nearly 50 percent in the last five years. Free Internet access is available at each library facility via 197 designated Internet workstations. Last year the Library received a grant of nearly \$250,000 from the Gates Foundation to purchase 84 computers to be placed at fifteen locations throughout the library system. Ten of these computers and a file server were

used to create a regional training lab at the Central Library, and the State Library provided a grant to add an additional ten computers to the lab.

Although all libraries are connected to the Sannet network via T-1 lines, the wiring within the Central Library and many branch libraries is inadequate and needs upgrading. The situation at the Central Library is particularly urgent, since no more connections can be added. Remote upgrading of software and remote trouble shooting cannot be accommodated until the wiring problem has been resolved in all facilities.

More than 200 computer workstations are three to five years old and need to be upgraded. Additional workstations are also required to meet the goal of having a lab containing twelve to twenty computers at each new branch facility.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the City of San Diego moves forward with its plan for library service, it will be important to consider the library as a system and not just branches and the Central Library in isolation. There is an ongoing charge to obtain input from the citizens to ensure that library services address their wants and needs.

Respectfully submitted,

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Approved: Bruce A. Herring



